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ABSTRACT

This book presents the reflections of 53 award-winning first-year teachers who talk candidly about their successes and setbacks, emphasizing the relationships they formed with colleagues, university professors, and students' parents. It is based on discussions sparked by questions about supports that they needed in their first year of teaching and on their essays from the Sallie Mae First Class Teacher contest. Section 1 presents a message for new teachers that stresses the importance of support and describes new initiatives and national attention to the issue. Section 2 discusses working with veteran teachers, noting rewards and drawbacks. Section 3 focuses on working with parents, explaining why it is important and how to connect with parents. Section 4 discusses working with principals, looking at issues related to professional development, mentors, and discipline. Section 5 examines working with college and university education professors, discussing partnerships with local institutions. Section 6 concludes that first-year teachers need more support. A list of resources for beginning teachers is included. (Contains 16 resources.) (SM)

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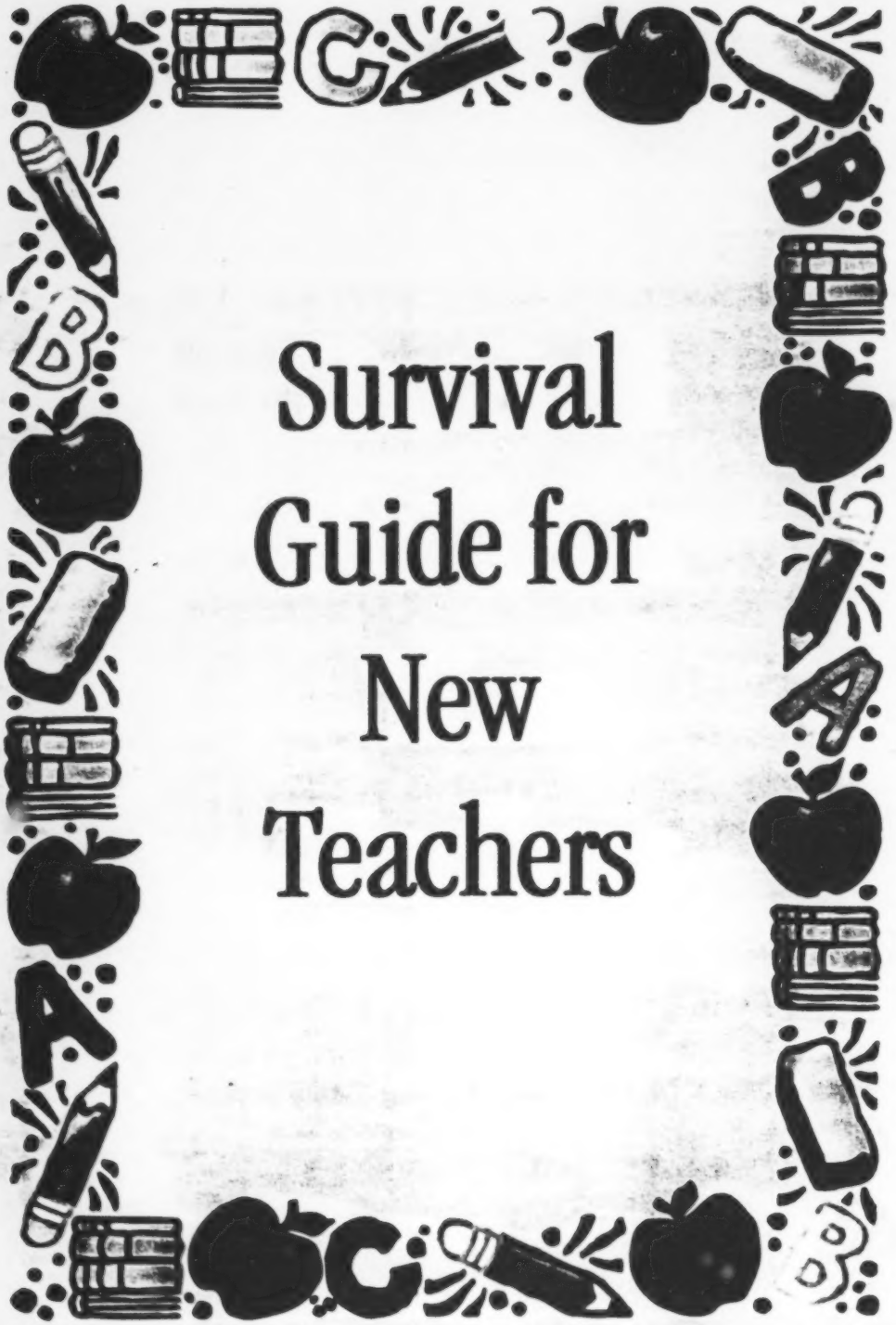

Survival Guide for New Teachers

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Survival Guide for New Teachers

How New Teachers Can Work Effectively with Veteran Teachers, Parents, Principals, and Teacher Educators

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Message for New Teachers

If you are new to the teaching field—or if you work alongside someone who is—then this book was written for you.

In it are the reflections of award-winning first-year teachers who talk candidly about their successes and setbacks, with a particular emphasis on the relationships they formed with their colleagues, university professors, and their students' parents.

These relationships played a crucial role in influencing their success on the job, according to the first-year teachers we interviewed. Veteran teachers, especially, are a powerful factor in a new teacher's experience, which explains why so many of the 53 teachers involved in this book spoke of the need for hands-on assistance from mentor teachers.

As award-winning first-year teacher Katy Goldman (Pine, Arizona) writes, supportive veteran colleagues are "your lifeline to information and sanity." Not surprisingly, lack of support from veteran teachers proved highly discouraging, according to the teachers we talked to.

Relationships with principals, professors, and parents also took prominence in our discussions, which yielded practical tips both for teachers and for the people who work alongside them. Suggestions focused on how new teachers can foster supportive professional relationships and what they stand to gain from them. First-year teachers also discussed what principals, veteran teachers, university professors, and parents can do to make first-year teaching a success.

The Importance of Support

Why is it so important to foster support and success for first-year teachers? Because dissatisfied first-year teachers are exiting the profession in record numbers, costing taxpayers money for retraining and leaving a significant portion of the teaching force with little professional experience. The exodus takes perhaps its greatest toll on students, whose productivity is affected by the high turnover and unstable educational programs that are often the result.

According to a recently reported statistic, more than half the new teachers in Los Angeles, California, give up their profession within 3 years, at a cost of $15 million a year. A 1996 study in North Carolina found that 17 percent of the state's teachers leave the profession after the first year in the classroom, 30 percent by the end of 3 years and 36 percent by 5 years.

Nationally, 22 percent of all new teachers leave the profession in the first 3 years because of lack of support and a "sink or swim" approach to induction.

What Does "Sink or Swim" Mean?

To start with, first-year teachers are still liable to be assigned the most challenging courses—the ones with a heavy developmental emphasis and students who need additional expertise to teach. Moreover, many new teachers receive little more than a quick orientation on school policies and procedures before they start their jobs. And there is often no time in the day—or week, for that matter—allotted for sitting down with colleagues to discuss pedagogical methods, daily dilemmas like time and classroom management, and coping strategies.

"I never sat in anyone else's classroom even once," laments first-year teacher Gail A. Saborio (Wakefield, Rhode Island). "Mine is the only teaching style I know. I felt that sometimes I was reinventing the wheel."

Given the pressures on today's first-year teachers, it's no surprise that drop-out teachers look for jobs in more lucrative, less emotionally stressful fields.

"Some of the state's top business leaders in banking and pharmaceuticals tell us that their leading job candidates are young teachers leaving the profession," says University of North Carolina Chancellor Michael Hooker.

The problem looms larger in light of the projected shortage of teachers and shrinking percentage of minority teachers in the next decade.

New Initiatives

Fortunately, some promising new initiatives are already underway. For example, 100 percent of the graduates of a program for first-year teachers from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Texas have stayed on the job after 5 years of teaching. Meanwhile, the statewide retention rate is about 50 percent after 5 years, according to the university.

Texas's Induction Year Program is designed to provide support and instruction to first-year teachers while getting them started toward master's level professional development. The program focuses on practical issues such as classroom management, communication skills, and discipline. Also, faculty members regularly visit the classes of participants to evaluate the teacher's performance.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, professors from the university's education department provide problem-solving support to graduates during their first years on the job. This program, called the Lighthouse Project, fosters online discussions that assist young teachers while keeping education professors up to date on the realities of today's classrooms.

In addition to university teacher-preparation programs, school districts are doing more to make first-year teaching a success. Districts from Delaware to Columbus, Ohio to Omaha, Nebraska have insti-

tuted induction programs for new teachers that include mentoring, peer assistance, and other forms of guidance and support.

But even as 21 states have established teacher-induction programs and some 5 more are piloting or planning initiatives, nearly 50 percent of beginning teachers still do not participate in anything more substantive than brief school orientations. In some cases, the resources are not available to provide good orientation programs, and in other cases beginning teachers do not participate in the available programs.

A National Issue

The U.S. Department of Education has a keen interest in the issues of teacher induction, quality, and retention and is taking steps to improve the American teaching force: supporting legislation to improve teacher education; connecting with teachers through a National Teacher Forum and listserv; and working with college presidents to call attention to teacher education.

One additional way to support efforts to improve the quality of teaching is through our interviews with the winners of the Sallie Mae First Class Teacher Award, which recognizes the nation's most outstanding elementary and secondary educators during their first year of teaching.

Sallie Mae, which provides funding and servicing support for education loans, annually selects one teacher from each state, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands to be honored in the nation's capital and to share their experiences and insights.

When the Sallie Mae winners came to Washington, DC, in September, 1997 they talked at length about the struggles that first-year teachers face, and what might be done to improve their experiences. This booklet pulls together their thoughts on how best to work with veteran teachers, parents, and others to give beginning teachers the support they need to develop their skills and enjoy their work—even in districts lacking the resources to provide extensive orientation programs. The Sallie Mae winners responded to a series of questions:

- What type of support was the most helpful to you in your first year of teaching? Who provided the support?
- What kinds of support should principals and other administrators provide to beginning teachers to ensure quality teaching?
- What kinds of support should teacher educators provide to beginning teachers to ensure quality teaching?
- What kinds of support should veteran teachers provide to beginning teachers to ensure quality teaching?
- What kinds of support should parents and the community provide to beginning teachers to ensure quality teaching?

This book is based on the discussions sparked by the questions above, along with the 53 teachers' contest essays. It deals honestly with the highs and lows of first-year teaching. For example, teachers talked frankly about the negativism of some veteran teachers; they also generously credited supportive colleagues and principals for getting them through their first year with flying colors.

And teachers also talked about *their* role in making the crucial first-year partnerships happen. In many cases, for example, new teachers who were not getting enough help from their assigned mentor took the initiative to cultivate an informal mentor relationship with a more inspiring colleague. New teachers also described the lengths they went to in drawing parents into their classroom and into the educational process. Weekly newsletters, phone calls home, and "contracts" asking parents to ensure a child completes his homework were some of the ways that new teachers pursued parental involvement in education.

We hope readers will take to heart the recommendations made by the 53 teachers we interviewed. Their thoughts could prove vital in making the first year of teaching—and all the years that follow—fruitful, satisfying, and productive.

The Age of Knowledge Meets the Little Red Schoolhouse

As the industrial age gives way to the information age, knowledge assumes a more pivotal role in daily life than ever before.

In offices and factories, for example, employees work in teams, pooling their knowledge for gains in productivity. Network technologies make vast quantities of data available from a desktop. People around the world with a shared interest exchange information on the Internet.

But in America's schoolhouses, places that exist to disseminate knowledge, a teacher in one classroom often has no idea what the teacher in the next classroom is doing (although some schools have developed effective "team approaches" to teaching). In many schools with isolated teachers, however, the principal may seldom if ever set foot inside a class to observe and give constructive feedback.

This isolation not only denies a new teacher the chance to improve performance by learning from experience, it fosters a debilitating isolation that leads to stress and burn-out.

And educators are facing new pressures that make it more crucial than ever for new teachers to quickly learn the strategies and methods that make for higher quality instruction. Nearly all 50 states have mandates that schools raise student

academic performance to higher standards, as well as drug education, violence, sexual harassment policies, and the increased demands that result from dwindling public confidence and tax resources. In some states, teachers will face sanctions if students do not show improvement on statewide assessments.

This book is one attempt to make the exchange of knowledge and support for new teachers an institutional practice—for the benefit of students and the communities they represent.

Working With Veteran Teachers

"I strongly urge first-year teachers to utilize those master instructors around them to learn ways of managing time, organizing instruction and evaluating students materials that are the most efficient and beneficial for them." —Colleen Abbott (Eagle, Colorado)

First-year teacher Shalon Cole (South Bend, Indiana) is not likely to forget walking into her classroom and finding a table covered with presents from her fellow teachers—a supply of much-needed classroom materials.

New teachers like Shalon appreciate any effort—large or small—that veteran teachers make to welcome them. "All staff members at the school need to make new teachers feel welcomed," says Susan Woodward (Merrimack, New Hampshire). "Just showing a smile helps."

Yet, many first-year teachers said they sought more than an open door and a friendly greeting. They wanted to sit down with veteran teachers regularly and work side by side, gaining real-world insights from their more experienced colleagues.

"I set up a relationship with a veteran teacher before I started my first year," says Claudia Crase (Helena, Montana). "We set up a time every day. We would talk and listen to each other and set goals for the next week."

Getting access to knowledgeable veteran teachers can be a challenge. Some first-year teachers we interviewed initiated a relationship with a mentor rather than waiting for a veteran teacher to step forward. In an unusual case, one first-year Sallie Mae teacher drove 500 miles to meet with another first- grade teacher. She felt the teachers at her own school did not share her instructional philosophies, and she was not comfortable turning to them for support.

Rich Rewards

The rewards of new teachers' outreach efforts to their more seasoned colleagues were rich.

"I quickly discovered the importance of discussing curriculum and problems with other educators," says Kristy Spencer (Cedar City, Utah). "Their willingness to share ideas and give advice was a great help."

"Experienced teachers have helped me with problems ranging from dealings with parents to working through mid-year weariness and fatigue," writes Robert Gress (Lexington, Kentucky). "They are an invaluable resource to the [first-year] teachers who are willing to admit that they have much to learn."

Finally, veteran teachers provided their rookie counterparts a vital head start in their professional development, according to Luann Brazill (Santa Fe, New Mexico), who began her career "working long hours during and after school and depleting my creative energy trying to reinvent the wheel!"

Then Brazill realized there was a better way to come up to speed. "I was fortunate to have chosen a career where I am surrounded by excellent veterans [and] professional mentors with a variety of resources and experiences," Brazill writes. "I realized that it was time to ask questions, put my time and energy to better use for my students and myself. Today, I wouldn't dream of beginning a new unit without inquiring about resources and possible models."

The Negative Side of the Veteran Teacher Equation

In worst-case scenarios, veteran teachers represent negative energy—holed up in the proverbial faculty lounge that many young teachers go out of their way to avoid, and with good reason.

"Needless to say, my first experience in the faculty lounge was very interesting.... I truly did not know that I had what some would call a 'problem child' until I got in the lounge and heard every teacher complain about that child," recalls Dionne Bennett (Little Rock, Arkansas). "If the teachers in the lounge were not complaining about their children, they were either griping about the facilities, or even about the teaching profession. I knew I had to do something!"

The "something" this teacher chose was to stay out of the lounge whenever possible, avoid negative conversations, and maintain a positive attitude throughout the day.

The Toughest Students

Several first-year teachers said that being assigned a class of all the most challenging students with the most complicated learning needs could be overwhelming. One lucky first-year teacher avoided this fate:

Mara Esposito (Seattle, Washington) said she avoided being assigned many students with learning and motivational problems largely because the other teachers knew her from the time she spent interning at the school. It was harder for the other staff members to assign to a fellow teacher whom they knew and liked students with learning and/or motivational problems, or students who lacked support from their families.

Encouraging Best Practice

Mara says her school's monthly "best practice" meetings reduce the opportunity for negative thinking and instead focus teachers on improvement.

But when veteran teachers don't take an interest in new practices, first-year teachers feel discouraged. The challenge is to keep negative teachers' lack of enthusiasm from dampening their own, first-year teachers said.

"I was told, 'Don't rock the boat.' This isn't great advice for teachers. We all rock the boat. Every day," says Claudia Crase (Helena, Montana). "Veteran teachers don't always like this. I say, 'Take a risk. Deal with it.' "

Firsthand: Teachers and Mentors Make It Happen

Lori Williams (Clarksville, Tennessee) remembers the excitement of visiting her classroom before the first day of school. She can picture the bare bulletin boards, empty chairs, and vacant filing cabinets. How would she fill them, and how would she fulfill the awesome responsibility that awaited her?

With a lot of help from her mentor and veteran teachers.

"As for those five, empty filing cabinets—they are now full thanks to the generosity of my esteemed colleagues who have shared materials with me," Williams writes. "I have utilized many suggestions from these veterans.... [In addition,] the mentor program to assist new teachers turned out to be a tremendous advantage. I was paired with a seasoned teacher who has taught for 31 glorious years. She guided, encouraged, and assisted me to help me become successful. Somehow, with the help of others and a willingness to do whatever it took to make things happen, I have managed to keep up with the challenges of three preparations of differing grades and abilities. I would advise a new teacher to choose a mentor, design a plan for success, implement a plan, and ask for help when needed. Looking back this year, I realized that I am like the **Velveteen Rabbit***—I am finally REAL."*

Look to Veteran Teachers to...

- Share lesson plans that put curriculum guides into practice;
- Support and participate in a new teachers' planning process;
- Offer tips on the practical problems new teachers didn't learn about in school—make do with fewer resources, classroom management, bureaucracy;
- Show respect and collegial support;
- Observe new teachers' classes and let them observe yours; and
- Help teachers locate materials.

Tips on Building a Relationship with Veteran Teachers

- Ask to visit colleagues' classrooms so you can learn about different approaches to teaching and find one you admire;

- Seek the help of a mentor who has skills and knowledge you would like to develop;
- If your assigned mentor is not helpful, seek out an informal mentor relationship that provides more support; look to your team teachers for help;
- Don't reinvent the wheel: before you begin developing a curriculum unit, find out if any veteran teachers have materials or insights that would jumpstart your efforts; and
- Be willing to admit you have a lot to learn from experienced teachers.

Working With Parents

"Parents became my greatest resource. . . . I openly solicited their active involvement and suggestions on how to better serve their child. I also presented them with ideas and activities they could do at home with their child to enhance their learning process. I later set up a homework/classroom Web site for my community of learners on the Internet so both parents and students could access the homework schedule. . . . I purchased a cellular telephone for my classroom and turned it on during my 90-minute planning block so parents could reach me, if needed, on a daily basis."—Margie Robinson (Viera, Florida)

First-year teacher Katy Goldman (Pine, Arizona) believes that children learn best "when given the opportunity to taste, feel, see, hear, manipulate, discover, sing, and dance their way through learning." But the parents of her students were clamoring for a more back-to-basics approach. Goldman could have given in, turning her back on strongly held beliefs, or she could have ignored her parents' concerns altogether, promoting bad relations. Instead, she navigated the tougher but more rewarding course. She showed parents how effective her pedagogical strategies could be and ultimately won parents' support, which has proven invaluable.

She began a weekly newsletter to inform parents about learning events in the classroom. She also invited parents into the classroom.

"This created a sense of well-being since they knew I had nothing to hide. Watching the children's excitement and 'aha' looks of accomplishment said it all," Goldman remembers. The long-term benefits of Goldman's efforts became clear over time: parental support for her teaching methods, which yielded a cadre of classroom volunteers and an improved, solidly reinforced learning environment.

Connecting With Parents

Teacher outreach efforts to parents most typically include writing a newsletter or inviting parents into the classroom. Calling parents with good news about a child's progress also strengthens the teacher-parent relationship.

Home visits, done either before or after the school years starts, can also be extremely valuable. These visits can improve significantly the relationship between teachers and parents.

"From the very beginning, I knew the importance of soliciting help from parents," says Julie Gutierrez (Richardson, Texas). "I sent a weekly newsletter home explaining our week's worth of activities, and in it, I gave ideas for working with the children. Conferences and phone calls also served as wonderful opportunities for me to get parents involved. Periodically, I sent papers explaining developmental stages of reading and writing so that parents might gauge their child's progress and look forward to the next step. It's amazing how quickly a child can achieve mastery when the support of a parent is present."

Making Parents Allies and Helpers

Teachers say parents may not make the first move but generally will respond when asked to help at home or play a role in the classroom. Some teachers involved parents in academic activities such as reading and tutoring, while other teachers turned to parents to relieve them of duties that otherwise would get in the way of teaching.

Marie Mallory (Reno, Nevada) writes: "It wasn't until I discovered just how handy parent volunteers can be, that I finally got the paper tidal wave under control. I overcame my time and paper management issue by delegating to my parent helpers. I had them construct the bulletin boards that I would create in my mind, so I could spend that time giving feedback to my students. I have one parent who could give any Kinko's employee a run for their money. She not only is the fastest copier person in the West, but she can run more types of machines in this school than anyone. It's rumored that she can fix them too, but we try to keep some things quiet around here," Mallory writes.

Sometimes parents require new teachers to earn their trust, recalls Mike Benevento (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey). "Parents have a hard time with first-year teachers. They view us as experimenting with their kid. If you show them you really care, then they are supportive."

Parents Make a Difference

Successful first-year teachers say parental involvement in education—at home and in the classroom—is vital to effective learning and discipline.

"Parental support can improve your outcomes immensely," says Melanie Rinaldi (Storrs, Connecticut).

"If parents back a teacher's discipline of a student, and the parent restricts privileges at home, the teacher notices real improvements in the student," says Mercedes Huffman (Washington, DC).

Disinterested Parents

Some first-year teachers are saddened to learn that not all parents can be persuaded to take an active role in supporting their children's education. When this happens, teachers must recognize that they are limited by factors outside their control.

"Naturally, I expected that the parents of my students would be active in helping their child at home.... I expected to have full support from each student's parents, for who wouldn't want to help their most precious gift, their child?", writes Pilar Geisse (Torrence, California). "Unfortunately, my expectations were not always realistic. Although they may want to help their child succeed in their educational career, some parents do not always have the time to help their child. In addition to this problem, I was shocked to find that other parents did not seem interested in their child's success (or failure) in school at all."

Firsthand: Going the Extra Step for Parental Involvement

Jennifer Rego-Brown (Portland, Maine) made it a priority to bring parents into the educational process. She sent home mid-quarter progress reports, checklists, and a written evaluation. Her comments noted areas where a student was doing well and showing improvement, and where the child needed to work harder. Her reports also discussed academic standards and behavioral expectations.

"If I could only pass along one important piece of information to first-year teachers it would be, keep the communication lines open between you and your students' families," Rego-Brown writes. "Keep your door open to visitors, volunteers, and parents who just want to drop in and say "Hi!". Send home weekly letters to let families know what is going on in the classroom for that week. Often times children do not tell their families everything that goes on. Call or send home letters as soon as a problem or concern arises with a student. Create family-oriented projects for homework and classroom activities for families. Part of a healthy and successful education comes from the home. If you involve families and the community you will have more resources for your classroom. You will find that an extra set of hands in the classroom or supplies that are sent in from home will help you as much as the children. Families will feel as if they are a part of the classroom and their child's education. Learning will also happen at home, not just in school."

Look to Parents to...

- Show support for learning at home;
- Communicate positive feedback about a teacher's influence or performance;
- Welcome new teachers;
- Volunteer to help in the classroom;
- Support fair discipline measures that teachers impose;
- Refrain from assuming the worst about first-year teachers;
- See that children do their homework;
- Offer the workplace for a field trip when appropriate;
- Talk to a teacher directly about a problem; and
- Become active partners in education.

Tips for Working With Parents

- Contact parents early on and before a problem occurs, particularly when there's good news to report;
- Consider writing a weekly newsletter or report on classroom learning and activities;
- Invite parents to come into the classroom and assign them tasks if they are willing;
- Involve them in reading groups and remedial assistance when possible, being aware that all parents may not read or write English;

- Let parents know how they can reinforce classroom learning at home; consider asking them to sign a contract requiring them to make children complete homework and other home learning activities;
- Visit families in their homes if possible to see firsthand how well learning is supported there;
- Address parents' concerns head on. If you are taking a pedagogical approach that raises questions, work to show parents the benefits of your methods and explain your reasoning to them; and
- Hold a parent meeting the first month of the school year in which you talk about your expectations for student achievement and behavior, leave time for questions, and if you don't know the answer promise to call soon with one.

Working With Principals

"My principal has a vision of us succeeding and she provides us with the tools to do so."—Jimmy M. Sullins (Ocean Springs, Mississippi)

New teachers who develop a powerful bond with their principals derive benefits that last them well past their first year on the job. A supportive principal can play a key role in helping first-year teachers find a mentor teacher, take part in professional development, and make full use of planning time.

In addition to giving teachers formal opportunities to learn and collaborate, principals boost morale simply by taking time to work alongside new teachers.

"Success starts at the top. I had a dynamic principal who is supportive of me in my classroom and takes time to visit my classroom," says Lori Ann Williams (Clarksville, Tennessee).

"My principal came in and taught a 2-hour lesson, giving me the chance to plan," says Stacie Weidenbach (Rapid City, South Dakota).

"Principals should be accessible, not just someone in the building," says Alice Smith (Grand Forks, North Dakota). "They should be more of a sounding board for teachers."

Additionally, first-year teachers say that evaluations go more smoothly when principals visit classrooms beforehand. That way, teachers are more at ease and can concentrate on their work with less nervousness.

Professional Development

First-year teachers say that seminars and workshops give teachers the chance to be learners and, in doing so, set an example for their students.

"Relationships with fellow staff, my involvement in school and district committees, inservices and conferences were extremely helpful to me," writes Christie McEwan (Warren, Michigan). "These things have given me rich resources to turn to for support, encouragement, and ideas as I have encountered challenges this year. They have helped me to grow as an educator and to feel satisfaction when I see my students glow as they meet their own challenges."

Claudia Crase (Helena, Montana) spoke highly of Montana's STEP program, which provides professional development opportunities for first-year teachers, gives them leave to go to conferences, and assigns a mentor.

One of the best professional development experiences is watching others teach, first-year teachers say. Again, principals were seen as the key to making this happen. Observing other teachers helps you learn "what I want to do, and never want to do," according to Luann Brazill (Santa Fe, New Mexico).

In addition to fostering professional development, principals should play a pivotal role in encouraging teacher collaboration by scheduling meetings for new teachers. Most principals also appreciate new teachers taking the initiative to meet with them. Even if principals are overloaded with work, most want to and will make the time to give support and guidance to new teachers.

Mentors

Well-administered mentor programs that foster regular meetings between new teachers and their senior colleagues are lifesavers for first-year teachers. Mara Esposito (Seattle, Washington) gratefully recalls that she was "saturated with support" in her first year of teaching. She had a mentor whose entire job was to support 29 mentees in the district. Also, teaching in a team situation meant, "I wasn't teaching in a box by myself; I had connections with other teachers." Finally, she and her team teacher had the same planning time, which was helpful.

But mentors with too many assignments often fall behind. Mismatched mentor relationships also tend to fizzle out. A number of first-year teachers suggest that principals should wait to assign a mentor until after the school year begins. That way, the principal can help a teacher select a compatible new teacher or let the mentee choose the best-suited mentor. If the mentor-mentee relationship isn't working to the benefit of the beginning teacher, he or she should visit with the principal about concerns.

Discipline

Teachers want a place to send children who are making it difficult to learn so that they can focus on teaching. And teachers want the disciplinary process to have some teeth.

"Students need to know that the principal is in support of the new teacher," explains Jared Hughes (Ripley, West Virginia).

"You've lost credibility when you send a kid to the office, and he comes back without having been disciplined," says Bente Casile (Smithfield, North Carolina).

New teachers also lose credibility when they send students to the office too often for things they should deal with themselves. Major discipline problems can often be avoided by seeking help early on when the problems are easier to solve.

Teachers also want principal support when it comes to dealing with parents, not just students.

"There was a situation where parents were upset over a book selection. My team was very supportive in this situation," recalls Melanie Rinaldi (Storrs, Connecticut). "My principal and vice principal came to my parent-teacher conference for me."

Other Helpful Supports

Teachers also need support to obtain needed supplies. Many struggle to get the materials they needed by soliciting parents or spending their own money. Finally, teachers want their principal to help them secure another key resource: time.

"New teachers are expected to teach a full schedule of classes, which doesn't leave time to prepare better labs or have someone show you how to incorporate an Internet site into a lesson. If new teachers didn't have a full schedule of classes, we wouldn't see so many teachers leaving the profession in the first years because they wouldn't feel so stressed out," says Mercedes Huffman (Washington, DC).

Firsthand: A Principal Supports Teacher Decisionmaking

When first-year teacher Melanie Rinaldi (Storrs, Connecticut) stumbled onto one of her first major challenges of the year, her principal stood ready to help. But "help" rather than "take over" was key to the experience. At issue? Rinaldi had to evaluate whether a controversial geometry book was the right choice for her eighth-grade class. Parents felt the book lacked rigor and disliked the new methods it advocated.

"I realized I needed to determine my stance on this issue," Rinaldi recalls. "My principal indicated her willingness to do whatever it takes to ensure that students are successful in this course. She would buy a new book if necessary, but ultimately, I needed to make this decision. I felt like she was making a large mistake here. Who was I to make such a huge decision? She had full confidence in me. She pointed out that I was the mathematician—I was the professional."

The principal's confidence in Rinaldi was put to the test when she had to present her decision about the book at parents' night, a prospect she wasn't looking forward to. "The parents had already met on their own to discuss this issue. I feared they would overpower me—it would be like facing a firing squad!"

The school's administrative staff was at her side the night of the parents' meeting, she recalls: "My principal not only provided great insights and emotional support, but her authority on my side made the solution 'OUR' solution." The book proved to be a successful learning tool. Students using the book achieved high test scores. Parents, meanwhile, felt satisfied that Rinaldi had arrived carefully and thoughtfully at her ultimate decision.

Look for Principals to...

- Spend time with teachers, visiting their classrooms and looking at their lesson plans;
- Be available for individual conferences;
- Set up a mentor program and arrange meetings for first-year teachers;
- Make professional development opportunities available;
- Enable teachers to work closely with one another, through meetings and team teaching assignments;
- Allow for planning time;
- Educate parents about what they can do to support their children's education;
- Avoid assigning all the most challenging children to the new teacher;
- Hold an orientation to the school;
- Provide adequate supplies, and clarify what items teachers will have to buy;
- Advocate for teachers to parents and students;
- Create a disciplined environment; and
- Help teachers with difficult situations with parents.

Tips for Building a Relationship with Principals

- Ask for professional development opportunities;
- Seek assistance in setting up a mentor relationship if a program is not already in place;
- Request that a principal visit your classroom and give you constructive feedback prior to the formal evaluation period; and
- Request time to meet with your principal.

Working With College and University Education Professors

"An education program might provide a follow-up appointment in the first semester on the job to deal with concerns a teacher might want to voice but can't bring up at a faculty meeting."—Robert Gress (Lexington, Kentucky)

Many teachers say they would benefit if teacher preparation programs monitored the progress of their graduates—at least those who work nearby after graduation. The program's administrators could keep its graduates informed of professional development opportunities or lectures so that new teachers could retain a connection to the latest research.

But teachers also acknowledged their own responsibility in keeping in touch with professors and education programs.

"Saying that teacher educators should drop former students a card is great, but realistically, it's not going to happen. We don't write notes to all of our past students and shouldn't expect our college professors to do that," says Lori Ann Williams (Clarksville, Tennessee). "We need to take steps to find out what's happening at the college."

First-year teacher Mara Esposito (Seattle, Washington) is still involved in her preparation program. She has given talks to interns, and interns regularly visit her class to observe. She and her classmates get together annually, and they have a newsletter about their experiences. "These are all tools of reflection for us as professionals," she says.

Partnerships With Local Institutions

First-year teachers appreciate any involvement on the part of neighboring colleges and universities in their schools, whether the teacher attended that program or not.

For example, music educators from nearby colleges regularly work with music teacher Jennifer Brooks (Banks, Oregon) and her students, sometimes serving as guest conductors. Watching outsiders with her students "is a great way to learn," she says.

Similarly, Dionne Bennett's (Little Rock, Arkansas) school maintains a partnership with a local university, and she is in contact with the education and biology departments, who sometimes send faculty members to the school to lead activities with students.

The Real World

Some first-year teachers feel their educations didn't adequately prepare them for the daily struggles new teachers encounter.

Edward Boll (Commack, New York) suggests that programs place more emphasis on real world issues. "Offer a course on teaching without appropriate resources, since this is the situation most new teach-

ers face in schools," he says. "The states set high standards, but they don't want to fund resources needed by people who are expected to teach the students and help them meet the standards."

"There needs to be more hands-on with classroom management in the teacher prep courses in college," Michael Higgins (Doylestown, Pennsylvania) says. Claudia Crase (Helena, Montana) echoes this thought: "I needed more hands-on work."

Stacie Weidenbach (Rapid City, South Dakota) complains, "The professors I had hadn't been in the classroom for 10 years." She, too, would have liked follow up and more time in the classroom during her preparation.

Look to College and University Education Professors to...

- Offer practical courses that reflect reality: lack of resources, classroom management;
- Institute a formal follow-up to find out how the graduates are doing in their new jobs;
- Be in touch for questions or concerns by e-mail; and
- Provide more top-quality classroom experience.

Tips on Working With College and University Education Professors

- Take part in follow-up programs for recent education graduates, and if there is no such program, stay in touch with fellow graduates during the first years on the job to compare experiences;
- Give university professors feedback on how well their classes prepared you for a teaching career; and
- Make yourself available to professors after you graduate to visit the campus and describe your professional experiences.

Conclusions: First-Year Teachers Need More Support

The passion that the 53 first-year teachers featured in this book bring to their jobs is inspiring. Their success in one of the most demanding professions imaginable shows us what can happen when a dedicated, talented teacher takes the helm of a classroom.

And yet, time and again, the teachers we interviewed talked about the difficulties they faced working in isolation, when deprived of the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, learn from principals, and form partnerships with parents.

The perseverance of these teachers despite such obstacles speaks volumes about their commitment, and it also confirms what we know to be true about the teaching profession—new teachers need policies that provide more support, and they need people behind them.

At stake is the quality of our nation's teaching force. America is losing some of its most promising young teaching professionals and failing to cultivate an experienced, expert teacher workforce—short-changing students and schools and costing taxpayers money.

It's time to listen to the words of the teachers who excel on the job despite difficult circumstances. When they tell us they want a principal who provides professional development opportunities, when they say they want the chance to watch veteran teachers in their classrooms, when they call for teacher preparation programs to provide follow up, we need to hear them.

And when they describe the efforts they make to build connections with veteran teachers, professors, and especially parents, tomorrow's new teachers can draw inspiration from their example.

We hope this publication raises awareness of the difficult experiences that a first-year teacher confronts and the role that educators, citizens, and the teachers themselves can play to alleviate their burden. Successful first-year teachers have a lot to say about improving their situation; now it's time to act.

More About First-Year Teaching

The U.S. Department of Education offers research and information on first-year teaching. The best way to gain access to it is through the Department's World Wide Web Site (www.ed.gov). If you want access to a selection of materials available at this site, type "first-year teachers" into the search engine (called "quick search").

Also on this web site is a publication called Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality. *If you want to read chapter five of* Promising Practices, "The Induction of New Teachers," *you can go directly to www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPractice/chapter5.html. This chapter profiles school districts' efforts to provide support for first-year teachers and lists the characteristics of a successful new teacher induction program.*

Help Desk: Resources for First-Year Teachers

The Internet is not a substitute for a wise, caring mentor or a break in the school day to plan a new lesson. But going online *can* do a lot to reduce some of the isolation that new teachers face. In particular, the Internet offers research, tips, lesson plans, discussion opportunities, and a treasure trove of data that can be easily downloaded.

Who's got useful information for teachers on the World Wide Web? To start with, try teachers' unions; the federal government; education reform networks; national nonprofit organizations in science, math, English, and other disciplines; corporations; and book and educational software publishers.

The following resources, most of which are free, are just a sampling of what's out there:

http://encarta.msn.com
Sponsored by Encarta encyclopedias: lesson plans and information resources

http://forum.swarthmore.edu/teachers/
The Math Forum Teachers' Place: math-focused lesson plans, software

http://web66.umn.edu/
A list of over 11,000 school Web sites. This site helps K–12 educators set up their own Internet servers and links schools so that resources can be shared

www.aft.org
American Federation of Teachers: issues, online discussion, union news

www.coreknowledge.org/
E.D. Hirsch: lesson plans

www.cuisenaire.com/index.html
Cuisenaire publishers: hands-on math and science products, K–12

www.enc.org/
Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education: reform ideas, lessons, software, professional development opportunities, and links to online academic standards

www.ed.gov/free/
Federal Resources for Educational Excellence: online learning resources available from U.S. government agencies

www.logo.com/index.html
Logotron: educational software and the following books: *The Educator's Internet Companion*, *Science Internet Curriculum Guide*, and *How to Create Successful Web Pages*

www.microsoft.com/education/
Microsoft: tutorials, training providers, lesson plans, and software applications for classrooms

www.nea.org
National Education Association: issues, online discussion, and union news

www.nbpts.org
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: information on raising teacher standards

www.sierraclub.org/education/
Sierra Club: educational materials on ecology and conservation

www.teachnet.org
Teachnet: lesson plans, online discussions, idea exchange, articles, and research

www.thegateway.org/simple1.html
Lesson plan search site

www.wested.org
WestEd: educational texts, including *Tales from the Electronic Frontier* (for teachers using the Internet)

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About Sallie Mae and the First Class Awards

Sallie Mae is a corporation that provides funding and servicing support for education loans. Sallie Mae annually sponsors the First Class Teacher Award, recognizing the nation's most outstanding elementary and secondary educators during their first year of teaching.

The winners were nominated by their school superintendents and chosen by a panel of education experts based on their superior instructional skills and interaction with students, faculty, and parents. One teacher from each state, the District of Columbia, Mariana Islands, and Virgin Islands was chosen. All 53 honorees came to Washington, DC, in September 1997 to share their experiences as part of the awards activities.

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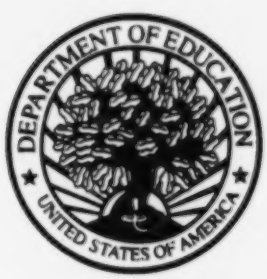

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